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**[Aristotelés. How to tell a story: an ancient guide to the art of storytelling for writers and readers. Translated and introduced by Philip Freeman]**

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**Freeman, Philip (Trans. & Intr.). (2022). *Aristotle: How to Tell a Story. An Ancient Guide to the Art of Storytelling for Writers and Readers (Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers)*. (244 p.).** Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0-691-21110-7.

Viktor Zavřel

The new English translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* by the American classical philologist Philip Freeman is part of the *Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers* series and, in the spirit of the series, is entitled *How to Tell a Story*. The intention of this translation is therefore clear from the outset – to bring ancient thought to the modern readers.

The introduction to Aristotle's work, which provides a popular introduction to the life and work of the ancient philosopher, is also written within this purpose. The author's remarks on the problematic of Aristotle's writings, who they were intended for, and the prevalence of acroamatic texts among them (p. X) are very helpful to the reader. The reader should always bear in mind this possible vagueness and incompleteness of Aristotle's works. The Introduction then provides a brief discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and in particular formulates several theses that summarize the basic themes of the text and help the reader to navigate it.

In a translator's note, Philip Freeman points out a number of editorial problems in Aristotle's texts (and particularly in his *Poetics*) and sets out the solution he has followed in his translation. He attempts to translate with both the precise meaning of the text in mind and with the modern reader in mind (p. XVIII). His main goal is to present a clear and understandable text, regardless of whether he has to translate some Greek terms using more English terms or to add a short definition of the concept to the translation.

The edition of the translation itself is quite specific. I particularly appreciate the fact that the text is divided into simply titled

chapters,<sup>1</sup> which undoubtedly contributes to the readability of the whole work. In a number of places, Freeman even engages in a *sui generis* "powerpoint" presentation of some key aspects of Aristotle's theory (pp. 35, 37, 75, 103). In this context, is also to appreciate the visual appeal of the text as a whole, which is underscored by this division. Interestingly, although this book is aimed at a modern reader, a bilingual text is presented here, while the translation itself lacks pagination (apparently because of the appended Greek text). I do not consider this editorial achievement to be an appropriate. On the one hand, I doubt that most readers will deal with the Greek half of the text for interest (this can be assumed *cum grano salis* perhaps for Latin texts); on the other hand, since the text cannot be used in a scholarly way precisely because of the lack of pagination, the scholars will always have to work with the Greek edition of Aristotle's texts. Moreover, the division of the Greek text does not, of course, correspond to that of the English, so it is necessary and rather tedious to constantly go back several pages in searching of the lost thread of the original. In other respects, this edition is very engaging, and one must appreciate its efforts to provide a clear and plastic grasp of Aristotle's text. In my opinion, it was only unnecessary to embark on a bilingual

1 Through these titles, the translator does not intend to give an exhaustive account of the theme of the given part of the text, which is very appropriate, since, especially in the works of Aristotle, it is somewhat difficult to decide what should be the main theme of a given chapter, which belongs to its title.

edition and, on the contrary, it would have been useful to add pagination.

The translation itself is very successful; it does not attempt to translate the Greek into English, but rather seeks to express in today's words the terms of the time. I will pay most attention to the terms that form the core of Aristotle's *Poetics*. This I consider as a keen and coherent translation of the first thesis of Aristotle's work: ἐν τρισὶ δὴ ταύταις διαφοραῖς ἡ μίμησις ἐστίν, ὡς εἵπομεν κατ' ἀρχάς, ἐν οἷς τε καὶ ἂ ὡς (*Poet.* 1448a 25) "So these then are the three differences in types of artistic imitation, as we said at the beginning: media (how the story is told), object (characters), and manner (narration)" (p. 15). Appropriately, the term "dramatization" is also chosen in connection with the basic attributes of Homeric poetry (p. 23), the Greek stating μιμήσεις δραματικὰς ἐποίησεν (*Poet.* 1448b 35). The basic building blocks of tragedy are identified as "character, plot and reasoning" (p. 37), in the original ἦθος, μῦθος and δianoia. While character and reasoning more or less correspond to the Greek terms (and also follow the tradition of English translations of Aristotle's *Ethics*),<sup>2</sup> I would choose a more specific term for μῦθος, reflecting a certain type of plot, a type of narrative that must be present in any poetic work. If we don't want to use the term "myth" directly, I would at least choose the terms "story" or "tale". As for the translation of ποιότης as "quality" (p. 41), I would use a term more associated with human nature in this context. Since the point here is that the goal of human life is not a property (ποιότης) but an activity (πράξις), I think that the term "property" precisely with respect to human life fits the concept better in this thesis.

The translation of the other key terms corresponds to the Greek original, so I will make only a few remarks. The term πάθος is coherently translated as "suffering" (with the emphasis on the more general dimension of this term espe-

cially in tragedy, could be also used the term "misfortune"). The word ἐλεός, which Aristotle uses to refer to the emotion that is evoked in the audience by the action of tragedy, is translated by Freeman as "pity" (p. 85), in which case one could choose a term that is probably closer to contemporary audiences, i.e. the term "compassion". While the term "recognition" is an accurate translation of the Greek ἀναγνώρισις, I would choose the term "poetic trick" instead of "invention" (p. 105) when describing this situation.<sup>3</sup>

I consider the only significant inaccuracy to be the translation of the term στοιχεῖον as "letter" (p. 133). At this point, it is undoubtedly not "letter" but rather "spell" or possibly translator could use *terminus technicus* "phoneme", which, moreover, we can clearly infer from Aristotle's definition (*Poet.* 1456b 25–26). The translation of this "linguistic" part of Aristotle's *Poetics* in general clearly shows that this issue is not the translator's main concern.

Notwithstanding the criticisms mentioned above (the biggest of which concerns the lack of pagination), this text is a good translation of Aristotle's fragmentary *Poetics*, and its merits lie mainly in its attempt to bring the subject to a wider audience, which is also evident in the rich annotation. Indeed, through engaging visual aids, Freeman attempts to make the text an accessible handbook in which even contemporary writers can find valuable inspiration (e.g. p. 181). However, this translation would not lose its meaning even if many people did not use it in order to *Tell a Story*. It presents Aristotle's brilliant ideas in a more modern guise, and makes them more engaging. Any such πράξις is meaningful in itself.

2 Also within Aristotle's ethical writings, the term ἦθος is very often translated as "character".

3 Aristotle, speaking of the various types of "recognition," also mentions, αἱ πεποιημένα ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ, διὸ ἄτεχνοι. (*Poet.* 1454b 31). In this context, the term "invention" seems to me to be an exaggeration, since it actually refers to the poet's weakness that forces him to use this type of "recognition" in the story.

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